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SUBJECT: IDPs AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN CENTRAL KATANGA

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Summary  
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¶1. (U) Security in the triangle Pweto-Mitwaba-Manono has significantly improved as large groups of Mai Mai combatants continue to surrender on a daily basis. A visiting USAID/OFDA evaluation team did not note any support in Mitwaba for surrendering Mai Mai fighters from CONADER, the national body in charge of ex-combatants. This situation worries humanitarians, as it might deteriorate if not quickly addressed and prevent the remaining Mai Mai combatants that are still in the forest from surrendering. However, improved security has triggered the return of some of the estimated 170,000 IDPs in Katanga including 10% of the total number of IDPs in Dubie. The IDPs remaining in camps unanimously expressed their desire to return home, but are awaiting several conditions, including the end of the school year in mid-July, an order from local authorities, a guarantee for humanitarian assistance upon return, and the end of the elections (the first round of which is scheduled for July 30). Although the IDP camps in Mitwaba and Dubie appeared to be functioning fairly well, food remains the major problem for most IDPs inside or outside the camps. Future humanitarian programs in the area need to focus on assisting IDPs in their home areas. END SUMMARY

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Background  
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¶2. (U) Fighting involving government forces and factions of Mai Mai dissidents resulted in the displacement, according to UNOCHA, of an estimated 170,000 people over the past 7 months in northern/central Katanga. Malemba-Nkulu, Mitwaba, Pweto, and Manono are the territories of central Katanga most affected. On May 12 "Gedeon", one of the main Mai Mai commanders, surrendered to MONUC forces in Mitwaba along with some of his lieutenants. Since then, security in the Pweto-Mitwaba-Manono triangle has significantly improved. Following the surrender of Gedeon, IDPs that were still trapped in the forest have started to emerge from their hiding places to seek assistance in Mitwaba.

¶3. (U) OFDA/DRC Rep Victor Bushamuka and OFDA Principal Regional Advisor John Myer visited central Katanga from June 14 to 19, 2006. The objective of the visit was to assess the humanitarian situation and identify the need for future USAID/OFDA assistance in the area. During the visit to Malemba-Nkulu, Mitwaba center, and Dubie, OFDA Reps met with different groups of Internally Displaced Persons

(IDPs) and humanitarian actors in the area.

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IDPs  
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¶4. (U) Malemba-Nkulu, which is believed to have the largest number of IDPs in central Katanga, has an estimated 53,000 displaced people. Most of the Malemba-Nkulu IDPs are located on the right bank of the Congo River in the localities of Mulongo, Museka, and Kayumba. They live in small groups and have constructed straw huts in villages along the main roads. According to the IDPs, most of them are from within the Malemba-Nkulu territory in areas that border Manono territory to the west. They are believed to have fled their villages in January.

¶5. (U) In Mitwaba and Dubie, the majority of IDPs are in camps. According to Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the IDPs are estimated to number around 9,000 in Mitwaba center and 14,000 located in Dubie camps. There are other camps in Mitwaba territory that were not visited by OFDA Reps during this visit. IDPs in Mitwaba are of the same Bazela ethnic group as the local residents and have originated mostly from the north of Mitwaba center in Mitwaba and Manono territories. However, the IDPs of Dubie are of the Baluba ethnic group while the local residents are Bazela. These two ethnic groups used to be enemies and have had several open conflicts in the past. IDPs in Dubie do not feel welcomed by the local population.

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Situation in the Camps  
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¶6. (U) The camps in Mitwaba and Dubie appeared to be functioning fairly well. IDPs receive food rations from the World Food Program

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(WFP) and CARITAS. However, many IDPs complained about the quantity and the regularity of food distribution. Despite the alleged scarcity of food, there were not many visible signs of malnutrition among children in the camps. MSF-Holland is assisting IDPs with basic health care and Action Against Hunger (AAH) provides for malnourished children. However, AAH is only assisting severe cases and moderate cases are directed to the nuns of the Catholic Church. Water appeared not to be a major problem for the moment, but it is expected to become an issue later in the dry season as the water level in wells drops.

¶7. (U) All humanitarians and IDPs considered food to remain the major problem for most IDP households in Malemba-Nkulu, Mitwaba, and Dubie. To survive, the IDPs in these areas often work for food in agricultural fields of local residents, for which they are paid about 1 kg of cassava flour (\$0.25) for two days work. In addition, in Mitwaba and Dubie, work is only available in remote agricultural fields that are as far as 15 km away from the camps. Most IDPs admitted to have already sold the non-food items received in the camps to buy food. The most commonly sold items include blankets, cooking pots, and clothes.

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Return Movement of IDPs  
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¶8. (U) It is a custom for IDPs to send emissaries back to check on the conditions in their villages to judge if it is better to stay in the camps or return home. Recent emissaries have brought back the news of improved security following the surrender of Gedeon and his troops. They also found that some cassava crops were left intact throughout the insecurity period. Many IDPs indicated that they were convinced of restored security in their villages only when they saw some "white people" -meaning INGO expatriates- safely visiting their villages.

¶9. (U) The return movement that started in May was mostly observed in Malemba-Nkulu and Dubie, but little movement was seen in Mitwaba. According to IDPs, the majority of households that have returned have done so to protect their cassava fields from bush fire, which

is commonly practiced at this time of the year in the area. Although it is not clear why Mitwaba has little return movement, it is believed that MONUC and high humanitarian presence near the camps might have played a role in people's decision to remain in the camps. In addition, the fact that the IDPs in Mitwaba are the same ethnic group as the locals makes the IDPs feel at home. In Dubie, MSF-Holland registered 1,400 IDPs that have returned in the last month, representing 10% of the total number of IDPs in the area. Unlike Dubie, the IDP return movements in Malemba-Nkulu are difficult for humanitarians to quantify as IDPs are scattered throughout a vast area.

¶10. (U) The IDPs contacted by USAID/OFDA Reps unanimously expressed their desire to return home. When asked why they have not yet returned, the majority indicated they are waiting for the end of the school year in mid-July. Others are waiting for the security green light from local authorities, a guarantee for humanitarian assistance in their villages upon return, and the end of the elections scheduled for July 30. President Kabila, during his recent visit in Dubie, promised to send a team that would facilitate IDPs to participate in the elections. Most of the IDPs never registered and those who did had to get rid of their registration cards by fear of being killed by Mai Mai if found carrying one. This has also encouraged some IDPs to remain in the camps for vote registration as promised.

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Surrendering of Mai Mai and Potential Security Issues  
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¶11. (U) Since Gedeon was arrested, large groups of Mai Mai combatants have followed suit, surrendering on a daily basis in Mitwaba. As of June 16, there were about 500 Mai-Mai combatants that have surrendered in Mitwaba. On the day of the USAID-OFDA Reps' visit, 44 Mai Mai combatants with about 160 dependents arrived in Mitwaba. The Mai Mai fighters handed in their weapons, but were still wearing their feathers and had their faces painted, which are believed to provide magical protection and repel bullets. They were chanting and appeared relieved to have left the harsh existence of life in the forest. According to MSF-Belgium, the Mai Mai combatants they have spoken to indicated that they are tired of fighting the

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gorilla war. In the campaign to encourage their surrender and disarmament, Mai Mai combatants were promised assistance and the opportunity to go through the demobilization or integration "brassage" process soon after they turn themselves in.

¶12. (U) When they arrive in Mitwaba, Mai Mai combatants and their families are accommodated in camps that are separated from those for civilians. They are receiving no assistance from the Commite Nationale de Disarmement et Reintegration (CONADER), a national body that is in charge of ex-combatants. Some of the Mai Mai families have been in the camps for almost a month without assistance. Humanitarian organizations in the area are worried that the situation might deteriorate if not quickly addressed. Many humanitarian actors believe that the lack of assistance could prevent the remaining Mai Mai combatants that are still in the forest from surrendering and continue to create insecurity in the area.

¶13. (U) Making the situation worse, the first wave of Mai Mai combatants that surrendered between November last year and February 2006 were sent to Lubumbashi to go through the demobilization process. These ex-combatants have now returned with their demobilization packages to their families living in civilian camps. According to MSF-Belgium, this has increased tension among the combatants that are still waiting for their demobilization packages. We were also told that the situation is tense as food is distributed to civilian IDPs in camps in the presence of hungry Mai Mai combatants.

¶14. (U) IDPs in the three areas visited are publicly saying that they are not going to tolerate living with the ex-combatant families once they return back in their villages. According to IDPs, the rebels, who caused them much suffering, are only being tolerated now

because they are still in camps, indicating that clashes between the two groups is likely when they relocate in their villages. This issue was first highlighted by INGOs Premiere Urgence and Catholic Relief Services in their assessment mission reports conducted in Malemba-Nkulu in April.

¶15. (U) Another development that worries humanitarian actors in the area is the report -not yet conformed- of a battalion of FARDC that has rebelled in Pweto since June 15. The mutineers cited lack of pay and military rations as causes of their action. They are believed to have allied with Mai Mai groups that refused to surrender. Apparently, the presumed mutineers have taken refuge in an area within the Pweto, Manono, and Moba triangle where fierce Mai Mai attacks on FARDC and populations are being reported by humanitarians in the area.

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Future Assistance Strategies  
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¶16. (U) According to IDPs and humanitarians that have visited the ravaged areas in Malemba-Nkulu, Manono, and Mitwaba all public infrastructure including schools and health centers have been destroyed. The IDPs will be returning to villages where their houses have been destroyed and, for the most, crop fields that have been looted. Although some lucky ones will find their cassava crops still standing, a poor harvest is expected due to the lack of maintenance during the long period of displacement. There are also many bridges leading to major return areas that need to be repaired if assistance is provided to these villages in the future. The major return axes include Dubie-Mitwaba and Mitwaba-Manono.

¶17. (U) To facilitate the return of IDPs in areas that are already declared secure, USAID-OFDA has requested that its partners focus on assistance programs in IDPs home areas. In this regard, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has planned on expanding its food security program to new return areas 150 km west, 135 km northwest, and 40 km north of Dubie. Premiere Urgence, another USAID-OFDA partner intends on launching a food security program for returnees in the territory of Malemba-Nkulu on the right bank of the Congo River. Representatives of both MSF-H and MSF-B indicated to USAID-OFDA Reps that they also plan on assisting IDPs in return villages with basic healthcare programs.

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